

Traffic Camera Safety Program Follow-up Report

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Purpose of This Report

Since 2007, the City of New Orleans (City) has operated a Traffic Camera Safety Program (TCSP) with the stated purpose of reducing traffic violations and improving road safety. The program used cameras to identify potential traffic violations, for which vehicle owners were assessed a fine. On January 30, 2020, the OIG issued a report on the management and operations of TCSP and made the following six recommendations to improve the functioning of the program:

1. City officials and program stakeholders should develop and implement an appropriate management and oversight structure consistent with the ordinance and any other legal requirements. This management structure should ensure clear lines of responsibility and accountability, facilitate communication and coordination among stakeholders, and use data to monitor and continually improve the program;
2. Program officials should assign responsibility to identify and obtain information on school calendars and closures, and coordinate with schools and with the traffic camera contractor to develop ways to reduce the issuance of invalid school zone tickets;
3. The program should revise its controls and processes to ensure that all citations are issued in accordance with the ordinance, including training program staff on the relevant legal deadlines. The NOPD should strive to improve timeliness of reviewing citations and should track appropriate performance measures;
4. The [New Orleans Police Department] should update its policies for review of citations, implement quality controls on approved citations, and work with [Automated Traffic Solutions] to obtain appropriate data for monitoring officer performance to ensure a thorough review of tickets;
5. The Adjudication Bureau should develop processes to ensure the removal of suspensions. The City should promptly impose penalties for delinquent camera ticket holders who fail to appear at hearings. The Traffic Camera Safety Program also should develop clear lines of accountability to resolve future problems promptly; and
6. The [Department of Public Works], Project Delivery Unit, and Finance Department, in consultation with the Law Department, should collaborate to refund overpaid money as appropriate; develop systems that comply with the Louisiana Uniform Unclaimed Property Act; and provide notice about overpayments to drivers. They should assign employees the responsibility to review data reports, including the overpayment liability report, so the City can identify and solve emerging problems.

What the OIG Found

Evaluators found that the City fully implemented two of these recommendations and partially implemented the remaining four. Specifically, the OIG found that:

1. The City changed the TCSP's management structure and improved coordination among involved entities, contractor oversight, and data analysis and monitoring. However, the new management structure remained ineffective in ensuring these efforts would be sustained over the course of the program.
2. The City assigned responsibility for identifying and obtaining information on school calendars, reducing the risk of issuing invalid citations, though opportunities for improved communication and accuracy remained.
3. The NOPD revised its policies to ensure that almost all citations were issued within the legal timeframe, and the department improved the overall timeliness of citations issued.
4. Although the NOPD updated its policies for review of citations and implemented measures for quality control and performance monitoring, the time spent reviewing individual tickets still raised concerns.
5. While the CAB reduced the number of suspended citations, staff and hearing officers still sometimes failed to enter dispositions properly, and 19 percent of hearings had no disposition recorded.
6. The City initiated a one-time process to issue refunds for overpayments and surrender unclaimed property to the State Treasurer. However, the process was not ongoing and the City began to accrue overpayments again, leading to a balance of over \$770,000 at the time of the follow-up evaluation.

Conclusion: The City took several steps to improve the management of the program, including data analysis, monitoring and evaluation, communication across entities, and contractor oversight. However, many of these changes were only implemented recently, and these management processes remained informal. Moving forward, the City should continue to strengthen efforts and build a sustainable infrastructure that will allow for ongoing improvements to the program.